



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SD GUARD GENERAL RETIRES AFTER 36 YEARS OF SERVICE

Brig. Gen. Michael Oster, of Rapid City, retired from the South Dakota Army National Guard after more than 36 years of military service to his community, state and nation. He was honored for his service during a retirement ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters at Camp Rapid, April 2.

Oster's career culminated as the Army assistant adjutant general and land component commander, and he held numerous key leadership positions during his military service. Oster served as the assistant adjutant general from Oct. 5, 2019 - Dec. 5, 2021, and was responsible for strategic planning, strength management, troop readiness, and mobilization support for the state's nearly 3,200 Army National Guard soldiers.

"You can't come in contact with Mike Oster without being able to see his passion and his commitment to excellence," said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, South Dakota National Guard adjutant general. "His care for other people, his willingness to get involved, and his willingness to leave everything he comes in contact with better than he left it, including people, is truly inspiring."

"What an awesome journey I've had over the past 36 years. This doesn't happen without a lot of people around you," said Oster. "I could not be more blessed with the career that I had because of the people I have met and served with."

Oster supported the adjutant general's goals and objectives exhibiting outstanding leadership and challenging subordinate commanders to perform at unprecedented levels during the COVID-19 Pandemic, ensuring all units were properly trained, manned, and equipped to support state and federal missions, while simultaneously ensuring the utmost care of soldiers and their families.

(continued on next page)

Oster (continued) .....	2
Secretary Whitlock Message .....	3
New Command at 109th.....	4
VA Second Chance Program .....	5
Davison County Mural .....	6
MWHF Mission 9 .....	6
NCA Address Change .....	7
We've Got Your Six.....	7
MJFSVH Employee of the Month.....	7
Gold Star Family Memorial .....	8
Fundraiser for Gold Star Family Memorial .....	8
Upcoming Events.....	9-10



## OSTER (CONTINUED)

While serving as the assistant adjutant, Oster helped in leading the organization through a particularly challenging time during the state's response to COVID-19. He was influential in establishing contact tracing teams to support the South Dakota Department of Health with teams from the Air and Army Guard, as well as coordination for two backup alternate care facilities to support healthcare networks in Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

During Oster's tenure, the SDARNG mobilized eight units along with dozens of individual deployments in support of federal contingencies to five different continents totaling over 500 soldiers in support of various operations. He also oversaw the SDARNG's support to state civilian authorities during several civil disturbance events in 2020.

"The manner in which he has executed his duties has made a significant and lasting contribution to the long-term readiness and professionalism for the soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard," Marlette said.

Oster began his military service in 1986 enlisting as a combat wire installer with Battery A, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery in Mitchell. He received his commission through the Officer Candidate School program in 1990.

He has served at nearly every staff level and command position throughout his career. Oster has com-

manded the 665th Maintenance Company, 727th Transportation Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, the 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, and the 109th Regional Support Group.

He is also a combat veteran and completed two tours of duty: one to Iraq in 2004-2005 with the Rapid Fielding Initiative, and his second tour to Afghanistan with the 152nd CSSB in 2013. Oster earned his Bachelor and Master of Science degrees from South Dakota State University and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.



# MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY WHITLOCK

South Dakota's Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs has served veterans since before statehood and has a long and interesting history. In February of 1889, the Dakota Territorial Legislature met and while in session, they passed a bill establishing the Dakota Soldiers' Home to provide care for veterans.

The Dakota Territory was the first of all territories to provide such a resource for veterans. Nine days after South Dakota became a state, the cornerstone was placed in the original Dakota Soldiers' Home building.

Over the past 132 years, the names and the design for the Home have changed, but South Dakota's commitment to take care of our veterans has not! Throughout the history of the Home, emphasis has always been placed on providing the highest level of care for South Dakota's veterans. Our Home has been "home" to over 4,700 residents since its opening.

It is our privilege to serve South Dakota's veterans and we take that responsibility very seriously. Residents can enjoy our beautiful grounds, the gardens, the resident library and media center, chapel, beauty/barber shop, bistro, transportation services, complete medical services, physical therapy, social services, spiritual guidance, and extensive recreational programming and events.

Next Thursday, (April 14) at 8:00 pm (CT), South Dakota Public Broadcasting will air a documentary on the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home on their "Dakota Life" program. We encourage everyone to watch this program and learn more about South Dakota's great custom of taking care of our veterans. The doors to the Home opened in 1890 and have never closed.

We extend an invitation to each of you to visit South Dakota's veteran's home. You will be proud, as we are, that such a place exists. For more information, please contact our Admissions Specialist Lisa Woeppel at 605-745-5127 (Ext. 1500115) or email her at: [lisa.woeppel@state.sd.us](mailto:lisa.woeppel@state.sd.us).

We have had numerous inquiries about how the proposed federal VA closures and downsizings will affect our Home. These proposals **will not** impact the care of our veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. South Dakota has a legacy of taking care of our veterans and that will not end because of the actions of the VA, the President, or Congress.

Missions and visions have changed over the past 132 years, but the one thing that has not changed is the dedication and commitment of South Dakota in providing the highest level of care to our heroes. As veterans age and different era veterans become residents, we are prepared to meet those challenges. We continue to expand and introduce new programs designed to best meet the current, ongoing, and upcoming needs of all veterans. Caring for and maximizing the overall health, welfare, and quality of life of South Dakota veterans has been, and will always be, our top priority.





# HANSEN TAKES COMMAND OF 109TH REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP

Col. Wyatt Hansen, of Spearfish, took command of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 109th Regional Support Group during a change of command ceremony on Camp Rapid, April 2.

Hansen assumed command from Col. Steven Siemonsma, of Rapid City, who commanded the RSG since Oct. 2021. The 109th RSG provides command and control for the 881st Troop Command, 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Medical Command and Training Center which are comprised of 16 units totaling more than 1,100 soldiers in nine communities throughout South Dakota.

The 109th RSG assists assigned units in meeting training, administrative, and logistical requirements to maintain the units' readiness in support of state and federal missions.

Col. Hansen has served full-time in the SDARNG for over 22 years. During his time, he has held the position of commander of the 842nd Engineer Company during their deployment to Iraq. He also deployed to Afghanistan with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and was the Officer Candidate School battalion commander for the 1-196th Regiment.

Hansen started his military career in August 1987. He enlisted in the U.S. Army as a rocket artilleryman and served with the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia. After completing his first term of service, Hansen reenlisted in the SDARNG's 109th Engineer Battalion. With nine years of enlisted service under his belt, he completed Officer Candidate School at Fort Meade, S.D., and commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1996.

He has held many positions during his time in the SDARNG, including: Construction and Facilities Management Office plans and programs officer, logistics management officer, force protection officer, State Partnership Program officer, administrative officer for the 196th Regiment, state G1 deputy personnel officer, and currently serves as the state G1 director of personnel.

Hansen holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Black Hills State University and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.



# VA'S SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs introduces new efforts to improve interagency coordination and expand outreach to criminal justice partners, to better help those reentering into society after incarceration.

In conjunction with a [presidential proclamation designating April as Second Chance Month](#), the initiative is part of the Biden-Harris administration's goal to provide meaningful redemption and rehabilitation for formerly imprisoned persons.

"Justice-involved Veterans deserve an opportunity to fully reintegrate into society," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "During Second Chance Month, VA is taking action to enable Veterans committed to rejoining society, post-incarceration, by expanding the use of a web-based tool to identify and connect them to needed VA care, while also restoring VA benefits faster."

In partnership with the Social Security Administration and Bureau of Prisons, the Veterans Benefits Administration is working diligently to streamline information-sharing processes among these three agencies to ensure VBA receives prison release dates for Veterans within 30 days after release to improve timeliness to reinstate benefits as applicable.

Currently, veterans bear the administrative burden of restoring benefits post-incarceration. Once released, a veteran notifies the VA, and the Department then must obtain verification of prison release dates from corrections facilities. This multi-step process causes a delay in the restoration of a wide range of health, rehabilitation and subsistence benefits for veterans. It also hinders their successful and full reintegration into our communities. Through collaborative information-sharing, VBA will ensure the load is on the agency, not the veteran.

Assistance available to impacted veterans includes:

- Expansion of the VA's existing outreach campaign to state prison systems and jails to increase the number of veterans to whom it can offer individualized reentry services and connect more veterans to post-release services while they are still incarcerated.
- Assistance through the VA's Veterans Reentry Search Service, a free web-based tool criminal justice partners and prison and jail staff can use to identify incarcerated veterans and connect them to needed services post release.
- Help through Health Care for Reentry Veterans and Veterans Justice Outreach which make up Veterans Justice Programs. Its mission is to identify justice-involved veterans and engage them through outreach to facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point.
- Outreach by Veterans Justice Programs specialists for the purpose of linking veterans to needed Veterans Health Administration services and other community resources.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports there are approximately 107,400 veterans in state or federal prison. Following release, these veterans are at increased risk of homelessness, suicide, and death by drug overdose — that's why it's vital to re-connect veterans to VA care and benefits to which they may be entitled, post-incarceration.

More information on Second Chance Month and its offerings can be found at the [National Reentry Resource Center](#).

# MITCHELL ARTIST SHARES HIS TALENTS WITH DAVISON COUNTY VSO OFFICE

Local Mitchell artist Stan Sherwood has painted this beautiful mural in the Davison County Veterans Service Office in Mitchell.

Thanks Craig and Alex for sharing your vision for Stan to create this wonderful visual.

What a great message for our veterans to see!

Saint Francis of Assisi has said, "He who works with his hands is a laborer. He who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman. He who works with his hands and his head and his heart is an artist."

Thanks Stan for sharing your creation for all veterans to see.



## MWHF MISSION 9

The Midwest Honor Flight Mission 9 Welcome Home event will be held Saturday, May 14, at the Sioux Falls Arena. Doors open at 7:30 pm (CT) with the program estimated to start at 9:00 pm.





# MAILING ADDRESS CHANGE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA) changed its mailing address for submitting the following claim forms:

- VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker
- VA Form 40-1330M, Claim for Government Medallion for Placement in a Private Cemetery
- VA Form 40-0247, Presidential Memorial Certificate Request Form
- VA Form 27-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes

Please mail your claim form and supporting documents to:

NCA FP Evidence Intake Center  
PO Box 5237  
Janesville, WI 53547

For faster and more secure processing of your claim, please submit your claim and supporting documents electronically by using Direct Upload at [access.va.gov](https://access.va.gov). You will be instructed to register during your first sign-on attempt. You can submit multiple claims electronically via Direct Upload.

# WE'VE GOT YOUR SIX

The third annual "We've Got Your Six Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair will be held Saturday, November 5, at the Sturgis Community Center (1401 Lazelle Street).

The Fair will run from 11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT).

Information about the event and registration for vendors can be found at:

[2022 REGISTRATION FORM \(weebly.com\)](https://www.2022registrationform.com).

# PINEDA NAMED MJFSVH EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Carolyn Pineda has been named the April Employee of the Month at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Pineda has worked at the Home as a registered nurse for the past six years.

She shows up every day with a smile on her face and ready to take on the tasks of her shift.

Her endless dedication, reliability, and team player mentality is appreciated.



# GROUND BROKEN FOR NEW SD GOLD STAR FAMILY MEMORIAL

SDDVA's Secretary Greg Whitlock, Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, and Cemetery Director Erin Brown attended a symbolic groundbreaking ceremony in Sioux Falls Wednesday, April 6, for the new Gold Star Family Memorial.

The memorial will be constructed in the Sioux Falls Veterans Memorial Park and is expected to be completed in September of this year.

Although the complete design is not finished, the Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments are a two-sided tribute made of black granite. One side bears the words: Gold Star Families Memorial Monument, a tribute to Gold Star Families and Relatives who sacrificed a Loved One for our Freedom. On the other side of the monument, there are scenes etched on each of the four panels: Homeland, Family, Patriot and Sacrifice. At the center of this tribute, is a silhouette of a saluting service member which represents the legacy of the loved ones who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.



## FUNDRAISER FOR GOLD STAR FAMILY MEMORIAL

If you are on the schedule to cook dinner next Wednesday, you might want to check out this opportunity.

Rudy M. Navarrete's Tex-Mexican Catering will host a taco bar dinner to raise funds for the Gold Star Memorial in Sioux Falls. The fundraiser will be from 5:00—9:00 pm (CT), Wednesday, April 13, at the VFW Post 4726 Three Rivers, 321 Main Avenue in Brandon. All proceeds will go to the memorial.

No cooking, no dishes, and a contribution to a great project!!!!!!





# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Apr 8—Purple Up for Military Children

Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites—(445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City

Apr 15-18—State Offices Closed

Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)

May 1—Loyalty Day

May 6—Military Spouse Appreciation Day

May 8—Victory in Europe Day

May 8—Mother's Day

May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City—(321 Kansas City Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)

May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference—American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre—(520 S. Pierre Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings City Library—Cooper Room—(513 3rd Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9

May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)

May 14-15—Ellsworth AFB Air Show

May 21—Armed Forces Day

May 30—Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—(25965 477th Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)

May 30—Memorial Day Program—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home —(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—10:00 am (MT)

May 30—State Offices Closed

Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10

Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)

Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds—(3200 W Havens Avenue)—Mitchell

Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls

June 14—Flag Day

Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown

Jun 18—Midwest Honor Flight 3rd Reunion—Sioux Falls Convention Center—11:00 am (CT)

June 19—Father's Day

Jun 25—Lake County Abate Poker Run for Midwest Honor Flight

July 4—Independence Day

Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL  
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City  
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School  
Aug 18-23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City  
Aug 22—The Barrel House Day of Giving fundraiser for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls  
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair  
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair  
Sep 5—Labor Day  
Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)  
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)  
Oct 10—Native American Day  
Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)  
Nov 5—We've Got Your Six Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
Nov 11—Veterans Day  
Nov 24—Thanksgiving Day  
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)  
Dec 25—Christmas

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>  
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

